

From the Academy to the Avant Garde Catalog Introduction
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Curated by Richard Simmons for Visual Studies Workshop

Visual Studies Workshop (1981)

INTRODUCTION

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The initial impulse to present this video exhibition arose from the belief that an important kind of video is currently being created: art that is demanding and dense, which sustains repeated viewing, and that is best understood in the context of other equally challenging works. Rather than add to the number of excellent surveys of video art, this more narrowly selective show *From the Academy to the Avant Garde* has been assembled to allow a more focused view into a type of video art that is of the intellect, yet is also articulated with wit and spirit.

Recognizing the challenging and perhaps unfamiliar nature of these videotapes, this catalog, written by curator Richard Simmons, has been conceived of as a companion piece to the exhibition. It serves as an introduction to the artists and their other work, as a guide to the exhibition as a whole, and as an aid in extending the encounter between the viewer and the work. It is hoped that this will enhance the engagement of the viewer with the richness of this art.

The audience for video art continues to grow, despite having been left largely to its own devices for an understanding of the work. Although video is well into its second decade as an art form, it is generally acknowledged that the core literature of analysis and theory in this field is still being developed. As might be expected with the introduction of any new sensibility or artform, a number of arts commentators and scholars, who are apparently at a loss for a comprehensive grasp of the nature and meaning of video art, have projected their confusion into publicly voiced doubts about the viability of video as art. They should know better. Any carefully considered review of video work by artists to date reveals the extraordinary manner in which their activity has enlarged the scope and reach of the medium. Video employs and enfolds images, sounds, and language; when intelligence and charm are brought to bear on such elements, new possibilities for perception and cognition emerge. Several of the artists in this exhibition have been making video art since its first years. For those viewers familiar with the earlier work, the tapes in this show will represent exciting advances in individual work. At the same time they mark the increasingly sophisticated state of video art.